

Maria Guadalupe and Liberation Theology:
A Study of Two Religious Movements that have
shaped Mexican culture and society.

A Thesis Paper

By

Damariz Posadas

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Introduction

When examining Catholicism in Mexico, it is immediately apparent that the Virgin Mary plays a crucial role in Mexican culture. This stems from a believed apparition of the Virgin Mary that the Mexicans call Maria Guadalupe. Since the time of the apparition to present-day Mexico, the image of Maria Guadalupe has been part of the everyday culture of the Mexican people. This is due to the history Maria Guadalupe has when it comes to the establishment of Mexican culture and nationalism. Believers of the apparition formed Marian movements; movements based on the ideology of Maria Guadalupe. Liberation theology entered Mexico in the late 1960s. This theology shaped the way existing Marian movements functioned. Once Marian devotion and movements mixed with liberation theology, a new form of worship and culture emerged. Liberation theology reformed the church, while Marian devotion brought people together. The current literature that focuses on either of these systems seem to suggest that these are two-separate movements which never interact. This is not correct. Marian devotion/movements and liberation theology are two movements which worked together to incite change in the Mexican government, as proven during the 2000 presidential election in Mexico.

This paper will show how the two movements have become intermingled in Mexican society as well as showing how this specific mixture of ideologies was a contributing factor in the 2000 presidential election in Mexico. The first section of this paper will discuss how the relationship between Maria Guadalupe and the Mexican people developed. This is to give a better understanding as to how Maria Guadalupe came to be part of Mexican culture, identity, and nationalism. The paper will then discuss liberation theology. This section will be broader compared to the first section, because liberation theology is a global movement. To understand how liberation theology functions in Mexico, one must understand the basis of Latin American

liberation theology. This basis is what the Mexican Catholic church will be using once they integrate liberation theology into Mexican communities. This brings the reader to the third section, which is the combination of Marian devotion/movements and liberation theology. The three main things in this section will be: how liberation theology shapes Marian movements, how communities have changed with the introduction of liberation theology, and how the mixture of these two ideologies affected the outcome of the 2000 presidential election.

Section 1: Maria Guadalupe

Maria Guadalupe is a central part of Mexican culture, image, and identity. Many Mexicans believe the apparition of Maria Guadalupe is a genuine apparition. Through the belief in the apparition and the authenticity of the *Tilma*, Maria Guadalupe became an important figure in Mexican history. Her message has inspired uprisings, revolts, and revolutions in Mexico. Lafaye and Keen observe, “Guadalupe had become the standard of a political struggle.”¹ Till this day many Mexicans, if not most, see Maria Guadalupe as the Mother of Mexico. Her image is a symbol of unity and a call to action.

According to the Nican Mopohua, a printed recounting of the apparition story, Maria Guadalupe appeared on December 12, 1531, to a poor native named Juan Diego. She instructed Diego to go to the head bishop and ask him to erect a temple on Tepeyac Hill, where she stood. Diego obeyed, but the Bishop rejected him. Diego approached Maria Guadalupe again, asking her to pick a worthier messenger. She denied his request, stating that he was one of her chosen

¹ Jacques Lafaye and Benjamin Keen, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The formation of Mexican national consciousness, 1531-1813 / Jacques Lafaye; with a foreword by Octavio Paz; translated [from the French] by Benjamin Keen* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 289

people.² Emboldened, Juan Diego approached the Bishop again. This time, the Bishop told him to return with proof. Diego relayed this message and Maria Guadalupe told him to return to the hill the next day when she would provide him with proof. The next day, Juan Diego went to the hill and met Maria Guadalupe. Tepeyac Hill had hundreds of wild Castilian roses growing from it, something impossible for the season. Together, they gathered flowers and placed them in his *Tilma*, a poor man's cloak made of cactus fibers. Diego then went to the Bishop and unraveled his flower-filled *Tilma*. As the flowers fell, the image of Maria Guadalupe appeared in the fabric. Convinced, the Bishop ordered the construction of a temple upon the hill.

Many elements of this story emphasized the importance of the natives. The first was that Maria Guadalupe chose Juan Diego, a native, as her messenger. This established that the natives were "worthy,"³ of the heavens and not just barbaric slum (as most Spaniards viewed them). Her image on the *Tilma* portrays her as a Nahuatl woman with green robes covered in native symbols, and an angelic ray of light around her.⁴ The *Tilma* has survived to this day and resides in the Basilica in Mexico City.⁵ The story and image empowered many of the native people and

² Miguel León Portilla and Antonio Valeriano, *Tonantzin Guadalupe: Pensamiento náhuatl y mensaje cristiano en el "Nican mopohua"* / Miguel León-Portilla, 1. ed., Sección de obras de antropología (México: Colegio Nacional Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 115

Quote: listen, you the youngest of my children, so that your heart understands, people of rank are not my servants, my messengers. I cannot put them in charge of carrying my breath/being, my word, to complete my will. It is very necessary that you go, advocate for this, thanks to you it will be realized, my will and wants will be fulfilled. (Translated by Damariz Posadas)

³ Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The origins and sources of a Mexican national symbol, 1531-1797* / by Stafford Poole (Tuscon, London: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 99

Quote: "give the criollos a powerful new symbol of their statues as a great and chosen people" This was about 100 years after the apparition, but it should be understood that this process is slow.

⁴ *ibid.*, 104

Quote: "The Virgin of Guadalupe was called "our criolla sovereign" and the image "the criolla image of Guadalupe, so that she may always intercede for her homeland."

⁵ D. A. Brading, *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition across Five Centuries* (2003), 66

Quote: "the image was placed on the high altar in the cathedral of Mexico, where the entire population turned out to venerate it, their joy reminiscent of the shepherd who came to pay homage to the child Jesus at Bethlehem"

the Bishop's acceptance of Diego's proof symbolized the acceptance of the natives as equals to the Spaniards. This acceptance is the first step leading to what would become Mexican identity.⁶

After the apparition

Many people have tried to question or condemn the Mexican people for their devotion to Maria Guadalupe. These outsiders (mostly Europeans) became a common enemy that helped unite the people of New Spain identify as Mexican and gather under the banner of Maria Guadalupe.⁷ A century after the apparition, two books detailing the apparition story were published. Other devotional works were in circulation during this time, but these two are the only books which have the apparition story. The first book is by Miguel Sanchez, in 1648, who used poetic language to describe the event. Sanchez wrote for a Spaniard audience, making his narrative less critical of the Catholic Church.⁸ The second book is by Luis Lasso de la Vega in 1649; it is mostly in the Nahuatl language, this is the book that contains the Nican Mopohua. There is a scholarly debate on whether he is the true author, but he is responsible for the work finally being published. Some scholars believe Antonio Väteriano (1531?-1605), a native, wrote this section. If true, this would make this section an account written by a native who lived during the time of the apparition. Therefore, some scholars believe the text is from 1560, with the earliest print being in 1649.⁹ If this is correct, this would show almost the immediate attention

⁶ Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, 100

Quote: "The eagerness and rapidity with which the criollos, especially the clergy embraced the new devotion and used it as the basis for a myth of uniqueness and distinct identity show that criollismo had reached a critical mass by the mid seventeenth century."

⁷ Lafaye and Keen, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, 228

Quote: "Creoles, mestizos, and Indians of New Spain found themselves gathered under the banner of Guadalupe"

⁸ Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe* pgs 101-110 describe the life of Miguel Sanchez, the impacts his writing had, and the response the public had to this writing.

⁹ León Portilla and Valeriano, *Tonantzin Guadalupe*

In this book, there is a section devoted to the scholarly debate on if Antonio Väteriano is the true author. It points to the language the Nican Mopohua is written (Nahuatl) is an older form of the language, a writing which Lasso de

and faith the native people had for Maria Guadalupe. Lafaye and Keen put it this way: “The two books could pass for two more of the many works of devotion published in New Spain in that period. But they had a special meaning, at least in the long run, for they were the first step toward recognition of Guadalupe as the Mexican national symbol.”¹⁰ The process was not a fast or easy one, but it did set in motion what would become Mexican nationalism.

Maria Guadalupe in the Mexican Independence Revolution

For Mexicans, the image of Maria Guadalupe signifies a change in the name of justice. There are many movements that have happened over the years in Mexico that have had the image of Maria Guadalupe attached to them. It is part of Mexican custom to use the image of Maria when a call to action is made because she is the mother and protector of the nation. "The choice of Mary's colors as the national colors and Guadalupe as symbol of the national unity ... was a consequence of her age-long role as protectress [sic] of Mexico.”¹¹ Many people gather under her banner because the Mexican people see her a representation of righteousness.

Cry of Hidalgo

Mexicans regard September 16, 1810, as their Independence Day, however, Mexico did not truly gain its independence until August of 1821. The reason why Mexicans celebrate their Independence Day on September 16 is due to Miguel Hidalgo. Father Miguel Hidalgo was a priest in Dolores, a small and poor village in Mexico. He was a Guadalupano, a believer in the message of unity which Maria inspired. Over the year Hidalgo developed a revolutionary ideology and on September 16, 1810, he issued his “Cry of Dolores” calling on the people to

la Vega does not know. There are also accounts of Vateriano having been writing the story, but it was somehow lost. There is more evidence presented, the first one being one an important piece of evidence.

¹⁰ Lafaye and Keen, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, 248

¹¹ *ibid.*, 289

start the Mexican Independence movement. With the cry of Miguel Hidalgo, Mexico's population moved toward a revolutionary period spear-headed by him. Maria Guadalupe's message of the natives as the chosen people was a rallying point to justify Mexico's independence and "Guadalupe naturally became the banner of the insurgents when Hidalgo issued the 'cry of Dolores' in 1810."¹² Most revolutionary groups consisted of natives and mestizos. Their goal was to capture as many cities as possible. Unfortunately, the groups were not able to hold out, allowing the Spanish to capture and execute Hidalgo in 1811, 10 years before Mexico's historical Independence Day. Despite the failed revolution many still consider this first cry to independence as the start of Mexico's independence. The revolutionary movement's use of the image of Maria Guadalupe is what ties her to Mexican history.

Jose Maria Morelos

Jose Maria Morelos (1765-1850) was a Catholic priest and a close friend of Hidalgo. During the revolution, many people including priest like Morelos, joined the independence movement. After his friend's execution, many of the revolutionaries became disheartened and began to abandon the movement. Morelos successfully carried on the revolutionary spirit and revived the need/want for independence in Mexico (not New Spain). He also strengthened the association between Maria Guadalupe and the revolution by requiring that "every man above the age of ten carry in his hat a cockade with the national colors, namely, white and blue, a device consisting of a ribbon or brand, or cloth or paper, which will proclaim him a devotee of the image of Guadalupe, soldier, and defender of her cult."¹³ This further solidified the connection between the people's faith in Maria Guadalupe and the revolutionary movement.

¹² *ibid.*, 287

¹³ *ibid.*, 289

The Mexican Revolution

Due to Hidalgo and Morales, the Mexican revolution (1810-1821) had strong ties to Maria Guadalupe through imagery and ideology. During the revolution, many Mexicans would carry her image as a charm and pray for victory.¹⁴ Seeing themselves as the chosen people emboldened many Mexicans to continue the revolution at all costs. The image of Maria Guadalupe became an inspiration to keep on going. Through this, she became the national symbol of Mexico, representing the struggles of the people, especially during the revolution.¹⁵ After Mexico had won its freedom from Spain, Mexico's people moved forward and created their own government.

The first president of the Mexican Republic, born José Miguel Ramón Adauto Fernández y Félix, took the name Guadalupe Victoria.¹⁶ Victoria was a subordinate of Morelos and was the general of the Revolutionary Army in Veracruz. He changed his name after he won the Battle of Oaxaca as a tribute to Maria Guadalupe. When translated his name means Guadalupe victory. This is one of many examples of how the Mexican people attributed their victories and independence to Maria Guadalupe. This solidified Maria Guadalupe as a national symbol and part of Mexican national culture.

Marian Movements after the Revolution

Marian movements after the Mexican revolution are more centered on social justice issues as a reaction to the corruption of the Mexican government. During the next decades, the

¹⁴ Ibid. Quote: "Guadalupan propaganda tract was thus within the reach of every purse and was one form of the muted struggle waged by Mexican patriots against Spain."

¹⁵ Ibid. Quote: "An order was launched that affirmed the spiritual permanence of the real Mexico against legal Mexico (New Spain). Guadalupe had become the standard for political struggle."

¹⁶ Ibid.

Mexican government became oppressive and obsessed with money and personal gain. This eventually led to the Mexican revolution of 1910.

During the revolution of 1910, Maria Guadalupe's image was a rallying point, mimicking the independence movement. Emiliano Zapata is one of the key figures of this revolution and the founder of the Liberation Army of the South (they would become the Zapatistas). The army became established in 1910 and was part of Mexico's 1910 - 1920 revolution. The revolution started due to the dictatorship of President Porfirio Diaz, who gave power to a few select individuals and confiscated land from the poor.¹⁷ The Mexican people banded together to remove Diaz from power. Zapata wanted land reforms, agricultural reforms, and for the land to legally belong to the farmers. To achieve his agenda Zapata led the southern forces during the revolution. His war/victory flag was an image of Maria Guadalupe, the same one on the Tilma.¹⁸ Most Zapatistas were natives and mestizos that believed heavily in Maria Guadalupe, this was the reason they carried her flag in battle. During the 1910 Mexican revolution many people came in and out of power but the Zapatistas sided with those who promised to place the reforms the Zapatistas wanted. The movement has lasted until today and is still going strong.

¹⁷ Juana Griselda García, *El pobre y el rico, mundos opuestos*, 2017, REPRESENTACIONES CULTURALES DE LA REVOLUCIÓN MEXICANA

Quote: "El movimiento revolucionario fue una catarsis del pueblo entre clases sociales por un gobierno dictador y autoritario que fue el de Porfirio Díaz."

Translation by Damariz Posadas: "The revolutionary movement was a catharsis of the people between social classes against a dictatorial and authoritarian government that was that of Porfirio Díaz."

¹⁸ Mas de MX, <https://masdemx.com/2016/06/este-video-muestra-la-entrada-triunfal-zapata-villa-a-la-ciudad-mexico-en-1914/>

- On the website you can see the video taken of Zapata marching into Mexico City. The flag he used can be seen as part of the procession.

There are other Marian movements which continue to this day. Most of these movements use the symbol of Maria Guadalupe to incite feelings of justice and unity. In Leon-Portilla's introduction to his translation/review of the "*Nican Mopohua*," he writes, "The other fact, also unavoidable, is that the central figure of the story, Tonantzin Guadalupe - is beyond the demonstration or rejection of her appearances - she has been for Mexico perhaps more powerful form of attraction and a fountain of inspiration and identity"¹⁹ When Maria Guadalupe became part of the Mexican national identity, she became the savior to the people.

Section 2: Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is a global movement which reassesses the relationship between the church/religion and the oppressed. It emerged around the 1950s and 1960s in response to various forms of oppression that sections of society were facing on a daily basis. Liberation theology has guided the oppressed to take their experiences, religious text, and culture to find a solution to their suffering. Given this broad definition, liberation theology is a vast movement, spanning across multiple countries, regions, and cultures. Due to this, liberation theology is complex and cannot be thought of as one thing. Instead, one must view liberation theology as an umbrella term for all theologies that seek to liberate people from oppression.

To understand how Mexico changed due to liberation theology, one must look at the context as to why it arose in Latin America. A well-known phrase some liberation theologians use is "preferential option for the poor," meaning the church has the responsibility to side with

¹⁹ León Portilla and Valeriano, *Tonantzin Guadalupe*, 14

Quote: "El otro hecho, también insoslayable, es que la figura central del relato, Tonantzin Guadalupe -más allá de la demostración o rechazo de sus apariciones-, ha sido para México tal vez más poderoso polo de atracción y fuente de inspiración e identidad." (Translated in text by Damariz Posadas)

the poor.²⁰ In Latin America, the poor are oppressed and marginalized.²¹ People who suffer from socio-economic injustices are “dealt with” if they try to speak out against their situation. Miguel De La Torre explains the situation as such, “Although no official numbers exist, hundreds of thousands of the ‘very least of these’ throughout Latin America died or ‘disappeared’ during the 1960s-80s. These deaths were committed or sanctioned by right-wing military regimes financed and encouraged by the U.S. government.”²² The constant fear and oppression these people felt, boiled over. The church realized this and had to pick a stance; to support the current regime or align themselves with the people. The church, for the most part, chose to help the oppressed and turned to the Bible for answers/solutions to poverty. In this Christian view, Christ identifies with the marginalized. Jesus, the man, preaches to the poor and protects them through-out his lifetime. It is this special attention given to the poor that liberation theology emphasizes on. This special attention to the poor is further exemplified by the Biblical stories and images of God. For example: in Exodus, there are passages in which God sides with the oppressed and facilitates their liberation. Stories such as these and the actions Jesus took while he was alive bound Christianity to the poor and calls for praxis (action) to liberate the poor. Through this, the people are bringing the kingdom of God to Earth fulfilling the role that Jesus took on while he was alive.

²⁰ Miguel A. de La Torre, *Introducing liberative theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2015) There are three types of poor. Those who are in forced poverty, spiritual poverty, and evangelical poverty.

²¹ Miguel A. de La Torre, *Liberation theology for armchair theologians*, Armchair theologians series (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2013)

Oppression can also mean racism, sexism, and classism. Something that they all have in common is that oppression is imposed on a marginalized group.

²² *ibid.*, 64

The term Liberation Theology was first coined by Gustavo Gutierrez in July 1968. He was giving a speech “*Toward a Theology of Liberation*” to a gathering of priests and laity one month before the *Medellin Conference*. In this speech he stated,

“Faith energizes my actions in history and makes me take that history seriously, since it is impossible to be a Christian outside history. At present one should not fear to say that. It is an understanding of what a contemporary commitment is - that is to say, one cannot be a Christian in these times without a commitment to liberation. To be Christian in our epoch, it is necessary to commit oneself in one way or other in the process of human emancipation.”²³

This quote represents the basis of Latin American liberation theology. Latin America is primarily Christian (particularly Roman Catholic). Liberation theology began as Catholic moral activism due to the condition Latin America was in. A special focus in liberation theology is poorness, and many movements which have emerged from this theology tend to center around those in poverty.²⁴ Liberation theology arose out of the physical needs of the people due to oppression mainly caused by Latin American governments. Latin America had fallen into a class society, consisting of the have's (the rich), a minority group, and the have not's (the poor), who are the majority. The rich kept their power through corruption and exploitation, making this common practice across Latin America. This created more poverty and perpetuated an endless cycle of suffering and death. Due to this, the Catholic Church in Latin America started shifting their views from onlookers to active participants in addressing the problem of poverty. De La

²³ Alfred T. Hennelly, *Liberation theology: A documentary history / edited with introductions, commentary, and translations by Alfred T. Hennelly* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 75

²⁴ David Tombs, *Latin American liberation theology*, Religion in the Americas series v. 1 (Boston: Brill, 2002), 158
Quote: “During the 1970s, with political repression on the rise across the continent, the Catholic church in Brazil, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and other countries in Latin America started to refashion itself to the Church of the poor.”

Torre states the Catholic Church concluded that, "poverty is a scandal, a slippery slope to early and unjust death for those in its grasp. The widespread, massive poverty that prevails in much of the Americas south of the United States is an 'injustice that cries out to the heavens'" ²⁵ Due to this ideology, priests started becoming active participants in their communities. Churches became an extension of everyday life. Priests started getting involved in social movements and even encouraged their communities to part take in social change.

In 1968 the *Medellin Conference* (Council of Latin American Bishops or Consejo Episcopal Latino americano, CELAM) in Medellin, Columbia discussed the needs of the church in Latin America. The conference's attendees agreed that the most important thing was that God/Jesus sides with the poor, therefore, it was the Catholic Church's duty to have a "preferential option for the poor." This meant that it was the church's responsibility to help liberate the poor. This came in multiple forms, one of them being educating the populous. This was because one of the ways oppressive governments stayed in power was by not educating the lower classes.²⁶ They started by teaching the poor how to read the Bible. The goal of the conference of bishops was to liberate the people from oppression, especially the "institutionalized violence" of poverty. With its preferential option for the poor and focus on social structures that caused poverty, CELAM was essentially involved in the development of the movement known as "liberation theology."

²⁵ La Torre, *Introducing liberative theologies*, 17

²⁶ Tombs, *Latin American liberation theology*, 161

Quote, "The situation in Chile was particularly severe...Cardinal Silva, responded to the torture and disappearance of thousands of Chileans by helping to establish the Committee for Cooperation for Peace in Chile."

The institution focused on uncovering the truth Pinochet's military dictatorship. This organization also owned a radio station which they used to teach the populous how to read.

A more concise progression of actions toward liberation theology would be as follows: "Step Zero: Participation [...] Step One: Socio-analytical mediation (seeing) [...] Step Two: Hermeneutical mediation (judging) [...] Step Three: Practical mediation (acting)."²⁷ Step zero is the inherent need to participate in combating poverty. Participation includes living in the area and working there, it allows for a more personal connection to the people and their struggles. Step one is an analysis of the people and the nation. It encourages the workers to stand up for themselves as well as identifying the problems they face. Step two is the incorporation of religion. It uses religion as a way of evaluating the situation and finding a solution. With this comes the notion of soteriology, a way of reaching salvation. The church considers the poor and finds a way for humans to gain salvation here on Earth. Step three is the fight. It is the uprising caused by the people in response to their problems. Through Kairos, movement inspired by religion, a movement starts to emerge. To succeed, the movement must have praxis, or physical action. The action is the unity of the oppressed, publicizing the need for liberation, and picking what they want to fight for.

Base Communities

Liberation theology has the most success with base communities. These are communities that have accepted the message of liberation theology and have tried to free themselves from the oppression they face, in a peaceful manner. The people try to better their communities by giving children education, clean water, access to doctors, and they made efforts to reduce crime in their areas.

²⁷ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing liberation theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis; Tunbridge Wells Search, 1987), 41–42

“Liberation theology is incarnated with the Christian base communities (comunidades eclesiales de base - CEBs), which date to the late 1950s. The aims of the CEBs were pastoral, not political, but it was here that the dispossessed gathered to discover how to turn their Christian conviction into a liberative [sic] reality within their everyday marginalized lives.”²⁸

These base communities are what helped liberation theology spread to the masses. Once this happened the Vatican, which was detached from the changing Catholic churches in Latin America, had to reconsider their formal stance on the oppression that the people of Latin America experienced. Eventually, Vatican, the Latin American Catholic churches and other Christian churches would side with the masses and help promote liberation theology ideas/beliefs. Unfortunately, this did not last and Vatican turned its back on liberation theology (1980s-90s).²⁹

From the 1980s to the present, the base communities started to shift. Originally, they were peaceful and tried to stay away from politics. As the oppression grew in their respective countries, they became radicalized. As a result, “The base ecclesial [sic] communities (commonly referred to by their acronym in Spanish and Portuguese as CEBs) developed into impressive national movements in many countries, and especially in Nicaragua, Chile, Peru, El

²⁸ La Torre, *Liberation theology for armchair theologians*, 26

²⁹ Nikolas Kozloff, “The Pope's Holy War Against Liberation Theology,” <https://nacla.org/news/popes-holy-war-against-liberation-theology>

Quote: “During the 1980s and 1990s Benedict, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, acted as John Paul II’s doctrinal czar. At the time, John Paul was in the midst of a fierce battle to silence prominent Church liberals. “This conception of Christ as a political figure, a revolutionary, as the subversive of Nazareth,” the Pontiff once said, “does not tally with the church’s catechism.””

- Previously Ratzinger had been more accepting of liberation theology. He changed when he had become an “integrant in the Vatican hierarchy”

Salvador, and most of all Brazil.”³⁰ The base communities picked up where Vatican and some churches had left off and ended up being supported by multiple priests who disagreed with the Vatican’s decision to move away from liberation.

Section 3: Maria Guadalupe and Liberation Theology

Mexico combines Marian social movements and liberation theology which leads to a unique style of revolution and religious practices. As shown previously Maria Guadalupe is part of the national identity in Mexico, regardless of upbringing, almost everyone feels connected to "Our Lady of Guadalupe." Marian movements tend to have a bottom-up approach, this is the reason why many Marian movements end up being revolutionary. In contrast, Liberation theology entered Mexico through scholarly work, causing liberation theology to have a top-down approach when it comes to creating change.

The year of 1968 was impact-full for Mexico. This is the year the Medellin conference took place, planting the roots of the preferential option for the poor in the Catholic Latin American Church. Nevertheless, many Mexican Catholic priests were hesitant to accept liberation theology and preach it in their churches. The turning point for the Catholic church was “Mexico 68”. Mexico 68 refers to a college student protest which occurred between July and August of 1968. The students were protesting the political party PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). PRI had been in power since the 1930s. The students viewed PRI and the local government as an oppressive regime which functioned as an authoritarian government.³¹ This

³⁰ Tombs, *Latin American liberation theology*, 165

³¹ Emilene Martínez Morales, El movimiento estudiantil de 1968, February 26, 2006, The National Security Archive Quote: “Operation Galeana and the inter-institutional coordination showed that there was a decision made to massacre the population gathered (*for the protest). What this population was considered was the active nucleus of the national group that should be annihilated for the sake of the stability of the authoritarian system that was sought to modify (*by the student protestors). The genocide was committed to silence dissent by killing,

was also the year that Mexico hosted part of the Olympic games. The students saw this as an opportunity to expose PRI to the world and gain support to overthrow PRI. 10 days before the Olympics, students gathered to protest, the Mexican government responded with violence. Till this day no one knows how many died from the guns of the Mexican army, but the Mexican government claims only four students died during the event.³² There are historical pictures proving otherwise, with eye-witness accounts and missing person reports estimating the number killed to be in the thousands. Mexicans called this the Mexico 68 mascara(massacre). The public was in vast support of the young protesters and the outcry was immense, unfortunately, it was not enough and the Olympic games continued as planned. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church had to pick a side.

With the Medellin conference fresh in the people's mind, the Catholic church chose to side with the students. Reporter Barranco stated the following "The Council and Medellin are part of an internal 'cultural revolution' that leads many Mexican Catholics to rethink their social role in the face of injustice."³³ The Catholic church's decision to side with the people shifted the

wounding, imprisoning, exiling those who they (*the being the government of the time) identified could arouse social consensus to mobilize society." (Translated by Damariz Posadas)

³² *ibid.* Quote "At 18:00, when they reach the corner of Madero and Palma, the police closed in on them and shoot into the crowd. A waitress and 20 students were left lying on the street. The next day the newspapers report the death of 4 students, one of whom was Socorro Acosta, she murdered, hacked into pieces, by the fire department for this reason the corpses have been hidden" (Translated by Damariz Posadas)

- Mexico 68 took place over several months, throughout this time, the Mexican government will only acknowledge 4 deaths
- This source has a list of all who are known to have participated in Mexico 68 stating their statuses (dead/alive) after the protest. Looking at this section will give a better understanding of how many students truly died.

³³ Bernardo Barranco V, "Año crucial para los católicos," 1968,

<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/10/01/index.php?section=opinion&article=025a2pol>

- Quote: "El Concilio y Medellín de alguna manera son parte de una "revolución cultural" interna que lleva a muchos católicos mexicanos a repensar su papel social frente a la injusticia" (Translated in text by Damariz Posadas)

focus to the poor of their community. Thus, liberation theology entered Mexico through a more scholarly movement and has its history in church reformation.

Liberation theology spread across all of Mexico and was easily accepted by the Mexican community. It seemed as if another revolution with liberation theology undertones would have developed, but it did not. Although liberation theology was well accepted, and the poor yearned for freedom from their oppressive government, no revolution occurred. This could be because of the presence and impact Maria Guadalupe has in Mexico. It has become a custom that when revolutionary movements took place, the people use the banner of Maria Guadalupe (as seen with the independence revolution and the 1910 revolution). When people wanted to unite the Mexican populace, Maria Guadalupe is the perfect rallying point. Therefore, if a revolution were to take place, it would be under the banner of Maria Guadalupe and not liberation theology.

The messages "The natives as the chosen people" (Maria Guadalupe 1531), and "preferential option for the poor" (liberation theology 1968), are similar. The natives are the poor, and native culture was the struggle of poverty and revolutions to free themselves from poverty. Despite taking a backseat to the Marian cult, liberation theology did not fail, rather in Mexico, liberation theology affirmed the message Maria Guadalupe gave on December 12, 1531. Liberation theology mixed well with Marian movements, however Marian movements often changed with the introduction of liberation theology.

An example of a Marian movement being shaped by liberation theology is the previously mentioned Zapatistas. Emiliano Zapata started the movement to achieve agrarian reforms. After the revolution, the Zapatistas became a guerrilla-style movement using physical force when necessary while keeping their Marian roots. After 1968, the Catholic church became willingly involved with the Zapatistas, aiding with the movement's re-organization and assisted with the

articulation of their political ideology. Overall, the movement shifted to being more peaceful and focused on politics. A Zapatista describes it as such, "We all wanted change, we prayed, it helped but it did not solve anything. The church helps us fight. Yes, we use weapons. but not always. Right now, we focus on changing the government and changing the laws to help people."³⁴ This means that the specific introduction of liberation theology caused the movement to shift from a guerrilla rebel group to an armed, but also politically active movement.

Currently, the Zapatistas have an organized army and have made specific official demands to the Mexican government along with organizing protests, and progressive events such as the woman's month gathering. The Zapatista Army and Mexican Army still have skirmishes in the countryside. The Zapatistas still carry an image of Maria Guadalupe, although now it is usually as a necklace or tattoo. This shows they still have ties to their Marian roots and still have devotion toward Maria Guadalupe, but it is the arrival of liberation theology which has shaped the way the new Zapatista movement operates, incorporating the changes from above (the Catholic church) as well as their traditional bottom-up approach.

The Zapatistas were not the only thing affected by liberation theology, entire Mexican communities have changed as well. This shift caused the Mexican people to move from a distrust in the government and doing nothing, to becoming active participants in trying to change the government. The change occurred due to the shift the churches experienced. Professor Norget at McGill University observed the following about liberationist churches, "within the liberationist

³⁴ Zapatistas, interview by Damariz Posadas, April 7, 2018, Phone; Day to Day Life, Politics, Drive, and Anything Else Quote "Todos queríamos cambio, recabamos y si ayudaba pero no resolvía nada. La iglesia los ayuda pe liar, si usamos armas pero no siempre. A hora los enfocamos a cambiando el gobierno y cambiando las leyes para ayudar la gente." (Translated in text by Damariz Posadas)

Questions: How did liberation theology shape you and your community?

- Interviewee is anonymous

church's campaign, ethnicity-an elaboration of distinctive cultural attributes and identity has been highlighted as a strongly politicized mobilizing discourse."³⁵ Mexican base communities, especially within the rural areas, have a heavy Marian devotion culture. A Mexican woman describes Maria Guadalupe as such, "I love Maria! (*referring to Maria Guadalupe) She has always been a part of our culture and for a good reason. She is a strong woman and a good example that a woman can be important."³⁶ As stated previously, Maria Guadalupe is part of Mexican culture, identity, and nationalism. Since her presence helped the message of liberation theology be easily accepted within communities, the Church made a smooth transition from the traditional Catholic church to a liberationist Catholic church.

When liberation theology entered the Catholic church, again one can see a top-down approach. The heads of the Mexican Catholic church started the shift by setting up workshops and classes to teach people (mainly priests) about liberation theology. The priests started shifting their focus to the poor. Passages relating to the poor became part of everyday mass. More indigenous Catholic priests started to emerge, this is due to the recognized need for inclusion within the church hierarchy.³⁷ Marian devotion was still part of Mexican church culture.

Although Marian devotion caused a bottom-up approach in which people of the community

³⁵ Kristin Norget, "The Politics of Liberation: The Popular Church, Indigenous Theology, and Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca, Mexico," 24, no. 5 (1997); Latin American Perspectives, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2634028?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

³⁶ Zapatistas, interview by Damariz Posadas

Quote: Yo amo Maria. Siempre a sido parte de nuestra cultura y por buena razón. Es una mujer fuerte y un buen ejemplo que una mujer si importa. (Translated in text by Damariz Posadas)

- Interviewee is anonymous. She did go on to talk about the importance of women's rights and how if Mexico accepts and respects Maria as the mother of Mexico, the same respect should be given to all woman. She would also like for people to know that the Zapatista women held an event for Women's month which sought to break down gender stereotypes and empower woman.

Question: What do think about Maria Guadalupe?

³⁷ Kristin Norget, "The Politics of Liberation: The Popular Church, Indigenous Theology, and Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca, Mexico" Quote "Over the past 20 years, the increasing numbers of indigenous priests, deacons, and catechists in Oaxaca symbolize the partial realization of the goals of inculturation"

wanted Maria Guadalupe as a part of the church culture, the churches had no problem with this because Maria Guadalupe had always been part of church culture. Marian devotion also helps by gathering the community to the church, by helping the people identify with a key figure in Mexican history.

Both systems work together to create the current Mexican church and culture. Professor Norget described the current church and community culture as such, "the church serves as the local community center, and the parish offices house a bookstore carrying all the latest liberation theological literature as well as UCIRI coffee, other staple foodstuffs at wholesale prices, and herbal medicines." ³⁸ Marian devotion coupled with liberation theology has shaped church and community culture. The church has become more community based, and the community has started seeing the church as an ally. Through this, the community has started to become better organized and more outspoken about their struggles. Although the approaches are different, the message is similar and allows for the current church-community balance to exist.

Social movements, such as the Zapatistas, coupled with the change in base communities, contributed to an unforeseen defeat of Mexico's ruling party; PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). PRI had been in power for roughly seventy years (1930s-2000s), their rule ended when PAN (National Action Party) won the presidency in the 2000 election. There are multiple reasons as to why PRI lost the election, a famous Mexican reporter (Jaime Sanchez Susarrey) stated the following after PRI's defeat, " the defeat of the PRI on July 2 is explained by the ability of one man and the awkwardness and inability of the other " ³⁹ One contributing factor to

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Jaime Sánchez Susarrey, "¿Por qué perdió el PRI?," *Letras Libres*, November 30th 2000, <http://www.letraslibres.com/mexico/por-que-perdio-el-pri>

Quote: "la derrota del PRI el pasado 2 de julio se explica por la habilidad de un hombre y la torpeza y la incapacidad del otro" (Translated in text by Damariz Posadas)

PAN's win is, "being at the right place at the right time." PRI's candidate failed to consider or address Mexicans' dissatisfaction toward the government and the outdated reforms PRI had imposed on the people.

PAN took advantage of this and gave hope to the Mexican people using a revolutionary spirit and platform. PAN's saying was "Si avanzo, síganme; si me detengo, empújenme; si retrocedo, mátenme" (If I advance, follow me; if I stop, push me; if I step back, kill me) adding a revolutionary mindset. This mindset is similar to that of the independence revolution and the 1910 revolution. History has shown that the Mexican people respond well to this mindset, thus becoming a contributing factor to PAN's victory in the election. This being said, it was not only PAN's marketing and PRI's failed foresight that let PAN win the presidency, the increase in voter turnout was another major contributing factor.

Electionguide.org places Mexico's average voting turnout at 58.25%.⁴⁰ The 2000 election had a voter turnout of 63.96%. The 5.71% increase accounts for approximately 2,078,589 more voters.⁴¹ Also, according to the research done by *pdba.georgetown.edu*, one can see a jump from the years 1994 to 2000. PRI went from holding a substantial lead in Congress and presidency to losing everything to PAN during the 2000 election cycle.⁴² The reporter Sanchez Susarrey does

⁴⁰ "Election Guide: Democracy Assistance & Election News," Countries - Mexico, <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/140/>

⁴¹ "Mexico 2000: Population Pyramids of the World from 1950 to 2100," Population Pyramid, <https://www.populationpyramid.net/mexico/2000/>

The total population of Mexico in the year 2000 (102, 808,590) was subtracted by the age demographics which were not eligible to vote (Legal voting age is 18 and compulsory although not enforced). This left the eligible voting population at 56,914,655. From this population 63.96 percent was multiplied. From this it is known 36,402,613 of the population voted during the election. This number was multiplied by 5.71 percent to gauge the amount of voter increase compared to the average. 2,078,589 is the final count.

⁴² Political Database of the Americas, Electoral Results - MEXICO, Electoral systems and electoral results
This site is the only site which gives voter turn-out number for the elections before 2000. The site does not specify where they received their information, but everything about the 2000 election lines up with what other sites have reported. In the years preceding the 2000 election, the results are the same in this source as other online sources.

not explain or account for the shifts in the legislative houses, good marketing alone cannot produce these results.

A distinguished professor at Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla named René Valdiviezo presented at XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology, in the Research Committee on Political Sociology. She presented on México: Parties, Religion and Local Elections. In her research, a pattern emerged. The more Catholic a state was, the more likely they were to go out and vote. These states also tended to vote for PAN, and if PAN did not win the state; PRD won or PRI won by small margins.⁴³ Although she mainly focuses on local elections, and her numbers are not all from the same years, the numbers she put forth mimic the 2000 presidential election. It is also already known that the churches had been urging their parishioners to vote. There is no evidence to point to the churches favoring one election over another. Liberation theology based churches would also be less likely not to encourage a vote for any election, they would instead focus on all elections to help their parishioners on a local and national level.

As stated previously, the Catholic church had started to shift with the introduction of liberation theology. A lot of churches and social organizations started getting involved in politics; some advocated for certain candidates, some advocated for specific reforms, and other chose to not publicly support a candidate while secretly urging people to vote a certain way. The Zapatistas fell into the third category, on their website. They clearly state, “There is no official call to vote for any of the candidates or their parties,”⁴⁴ but another source states, “We wanted

⁴³ René Valdiviezo S., “México. Partidos, religión y elecciones locales,” presentada en XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology, file:///C:/Users/Damariz/Downloads/36-535-1-PB.pdf

The paper has detailed charts on Catholic devotion by state, and local elections result. They can be compared side by side. The main thing used to support the above claim was the results of the charts.

⁴⁴ Zapatistas, “Sobre el próximo proceso electoral,” Zapatistas, <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2000/06/19/sobre-el-proximo-proceso-electoral/>

anyone but PRI. That election was an opportunity to get them out of the government. I do not want to say that Vicente was a good president, but he is better than PRI.”⁴⁵ On the other side, many Catholic priests advocated for a change and urged people to vote. Previously many Mexicans had become disillusioned, rightly so, and believed their votes did not matter.⁴⁶ The churches’, which had become a source of hope for many communities, urgings coupled with the revolutionary spirit of Vicente Fox (2000 presidential winner) helped spur the unmotivated population of Mexico. This is one of the reasons that caused an increase in voter turnout for the 2000 election. The increase in voter turnout helped PAN take over not only the presidency but also the government (house and senate). With the base communities and social movements (such as Zapatistas and other groups) coming together, both based in Marian spirituality and shaped by liberation theology, it enabled for a shift in governmental power. A shift which was unpredictable but powerful in the eyes of the Mexican people.

Quote: “NO SE LLAMARÁ A VOTAR POR ALGUNO DE LOS CANDIDATOS O SUS PARTIDOS.” (Translated in text by Damariz Posadas)

The text is bolded on their official website and this was their official statement released for the 2000 elections.

⁴⁵ Zapatistas, interview by Damariz Posadas

Quote: “Nosotros queríamos cualquier que no sería PRI. Esa elección era una oportunidad para sacarlos del gobierno. No quiero decir que Vicente era un buen presidente, pero mejor el que PRI.”

- This was not a question asked. The discussion of politics arose and they pointed to the 2000 elections as being an important time to show change can be achieved. The Zapatista wants to make it clear that they did not publicly support any candidate during the 2000 election.

Questions: What do you think about church and politics.

⁴⁶ Ginger Thompson, “Ex-President in Mexico Casts New Light on Rigged 1988 Election,” *New York Times*, March 9th 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/09/world/ex-president-in-mexico-casts-new-light-on-rigged-1988-election.html>

Quote, “the presidential elections of 1988 were rigged”

- The Mexican government has since burned all evidence of this. Many citizens were aware of the rigged elections or at least suspected it. This and other events are why the Mexican people have little faith in the Mexican government.

Conclusion

Marian devotion is strong in Mexico due to the intimate history the Mexican people have with Maria Guadalupe. Liberation theology is an ideology which arose out of the need for change in Latin America. When both movements and ideologies came together in Mexico, they changed Mexican culture and society. Marian devotion/movements have a bottom-up approach. The movements and devotions unite the communities under a revolutionary spirit. Liberation theology has a top-down approach. This theology entered Mexico through the scholarly field and the priests are the ones that practiced/preached this ideology while also being the ones to go into communities to cause change. Although the approaches are different, this helps keep the balance between Marian devotion/movements, and liberation theology ideals/practices.

The mixture of these two ideologies have shaped Marian movements, caused base communities to accept liberation theology and by extension become more active in their communities. When this happened, Marian movements and base communities worked together to cause a ruling party of 70 years to lose the presidency and Congress. This is not the only reason why PAN won the 2000 elections, but it was a contributing factor. In modern-day Mexico, these two movements are co-existing peacefully with one another. Therefore, if someone wishes to study and understand Mexico fully, they must start seeing Marian devotion/movements and liberation theology as two movements which at times function as one; and when they do, a change has been proven to be possible.

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